

'FOUR-TWO-FOUR' FLOPS THREE-TWO AT MAIDSTONE

Don't Knock The System, Give It Time To Work Out

by NOVA

Maidstone 3 Wycombe Wanderers 2

"I MIGHT have known last week's result was only a flash in the pan", cracked one disgruntled Wycombe Wanderers' fan as he made his way out of the Maidstone ground on Saturday after watching his side charitably give away two goals and with them the first Isthmian League points of the season.

After last week's champagne showing against Southern league professionals, Kettering, defeat against Maidstone must have been doubly disappointing to all of Wycombe's followers.

But before any critics start knocking at the players, the team's methods or the new coach, let me remind them that everything takes time. The 4-2-4 system being used by the side at the moment is no magic formula that can turn a promising side into world beaters overnight.

Faults will be found against every team they meet at first. Against Maidstone they came up against eleven players who fought like tigers, challenged unceasingly and ran themselves into the ground.

Against this type of opposition Wycombe found themselves unable to slow down the pace of the game to that which suits them best. The defensive covering system that the 4-2-4 employs was severely tested. So it was little wonder then that two mistakes gave Maidstone the points.

But the way in which Don Welsh and the players thrashed out their mistakes afterwards suggests that everyone is willing to learn from them. With this kind of spirit, the ultimate end must be success.

But what could be much more serious than this defeat was the injury to goal-keeper Phil Patrick. He was accidentally kicked on his right leg towards the end of the second half and after the game could hardly walk on it.

QUICK SHOCKS

The Wanderers had a nasty set-back after only 15 seconds. By this time Maidstone had forced a corner. Right-winger Levy sent a low cross scudding across the turf to Grondona. His weak shot bounced several times before it was deflected past the diving Patrick, and Pullin stationed on the line, to finish up amazingly in the net.

These early shocks continued when Bassett, Wycombe's promising young new discovery, burst through Maidstone's defensive wall and slipped a pass to Jimmy

Hay, who side-footed the ball first time past goal-keeper Smith for the equaliser after only four minutes' play.

But the surprises were not yet over. Maidstone came back as strongly as ever and were only inches away from scoring when Patrick dropped the ball as he charged out of goal. But Peter Roystone, the towering pivot from Wokingham, making his league debut, stepped in and cleared off the goal-line.

Roystone had an impressive game. Later on he was called upon to make some more last ditch saves—with flying tackles and leaping headers.

But for the next 20 minutes he was able to coast along as the brilliant Charlie Gale and the ever-moving Thomas pushed on their forwards. And after 23 minutes Wycombe went into the lead. Bassett was fouled and from a curling free-kick Hay ran in by a line of defenders and nodded the ball into a narrow gap between 'keeper and post.

This goal shook Maidstone rigid. Their players began to get the 'bird' from their own supporters. Their passes went astray with monotonous frequency.

Then came the incident which altered, in my opinion, anyway, the whole course of the game. Left-winger Dawe broke away and Dave Worley rushed to challenge. Before he reached his opponent, however, the winger centred and the ball hit Worley. The linesman signalled furiously and after several moments' earnest discussion the referee pointed to the penalty spot. Even the Maidstone players seemed surprised at this decision. Justice was done, however, when Leonard hit his kick past the post.

But Wycombe seemed shocked and could not settle down again to their previously fluid game. Maidstone struck back hard.

Patrick gathered a harmless

ball and Pullin turned away ready for the big kick upfield. But the goalkeeper decided to throw the ball to the full-back. Clay took full advantage of the mix-up to nip smartly in, gather from behind Pullin and shoot past the surprised Patrick.

PALE SHADOWS

This goal only a couple of minutes before half-time put Maidstone into great heart and after the interval Wycombe were but pale shadows of their former selves. Gone was the cheeky confidence of Charlie Gale and Len Worley. Gone was the crunching superiority of Alistair Lewis, and George Pullin, while Thomas seemed unable to ascertain whether he was a defender or an attacker.

Roystone, however, seemed to enjoy the fray. Occasionally he was drawn horribly out of position, but usually he was quietly and competently in charge of the centre of the field.

As Maidstone grew in confidence so Wycombe's ebbed. Yet despite the territorial superiority Maidstone lacked that certain menace in front of goal, and when the pressure of their attacks began to fade after 70 minutes it seemed as if Wycombe might come away with a point. In fact a little more attacking at this period might have put them ahead. However, Maidstone caught their breath, and then led a second all-out assault on the Wanderers' goal, during which time Patrick received his injury—colliding with Dawe.

Yet this pressure might not have paid off if Wycombe's defence had not looked in amazement as full-back Leonard came charging upfield only five minutes from time. Five defenders stood like statues as the Maidstone skipper neatly side-stepped Gale, spurted towards the goal and let fly with an unstoppable drive from less than six yards. And that, as far as the Wanderers were concerned, was that.

Maidstone: J. Smith; D. Leonard, J. Shed; A. Sunnucks, D. Firmin, S. Davies; C. Levy, J. Grondona, M. Clay, P. Long, R. Dawe.

Wycombe: P. Patrick; A. Lewis, G. Pullin; D. Worley, P. Roystone, C. Gale; L. Worley, D. Bassett, D. Thomas, J. Hay, L. Merrick.